

# **POLICY MAKING**

## **Basics of Policy Making**

Policy making is one of the most important functions of a governing library board. Advisory boards often recommend policies to the city or county governing body. Some advisory boards may be authorized to make policies. Policies are general statements governing library operations, rules, and use. They are vital tools that do much to determine the orderly success of the library and the course of its future development. Policies should be flexible rather than overly rigid, and should be reviewed on a regular basis. It is the governing board of trustees that is responsible for adopting written policies to govern and guide all phases of library operation.

Policies should be tailored to local conditions and should flow from the library's roles and mission statement. It is the responsibility of the library director to implement board policies through the development of library procedure. When all elements of the process are in place, the library director and staff have direction of the day-to-day operation of the library, and both the public and the staff are assured of consistent treatment in all aspects of library service.

**Policies are not carved in stone!  
Resources, communities, and goals change and grow.  
Policies must reflect current needs and services.**

### **Who Develops Policy?**

While only governing boards of trustees usually have the legal responsibility and authority to make policy, experience shows that the process works best when the library director and staff are involved in researching options, drafting policies, and presenting a report, including recommendations to the board. The library's staff has access to manuals and samples from various communities and can adapt them to the needs of the library.

### **Organization**

All policies should be recorded, compiled, and organized for ready access in a policy manual. A loose-leaf binder provides a useful format because it allows easy revision. The contents of a policy manual are probably best categorized and numbered under some form of topical heading for easy reference. As each new policy or revision is adopted, the policy should be numbered and the date of adoption noted.

### **What Should You Do If Your Library Does Not Have A Policy Manual?**

1. Ask your library director to review all of the board minutes and list all policies (with the date of adoption) and categorize them into topical headings.
2. Bring your document to the board so that the policies can be reviewed for legality, clarity, completeness, and comprehensive.

## Distribution

Every trustee should have a copy of the policy manual and be completely familiar with the rationale for each statement. A thorough understanding of all policies is essential in order to adopt new policies or revise existing ones in a knowledgeable manner. Trustees may also be called upon to defend or interpret policies to the public or governing officials.

Copies of the policy manual should also be available in all libraries in the system. The director is responsible for instructing personnel in the rationale of policies so that staff members understand the basis for procedures.

## How Are Policies Developed?

Policy development and changes are major decisions affecting established practice and policies. Trustees should allow adequate time for policy consideration. Systematic policy development includes:

1. A statement of the condition or problem, past or present, that requires policy consideration.
2. A statement telling how any policy will contribute to the accomplishment of the library's mission, goals, and objectives.
3. A statement of all existing policies related to or affected by the policy decision.
4. A listing of policy options available, with an analysis of:
  - a) long- and short-range effects of enacting new policy,
  - b) potential side effects — good or bad — of passing each policy,
  - c) relevant legal ramifications, and
  - d) cost in terms of library resources: staff, budget, collections, and buildings.
5. A recommendation from the library director, accompanied by a summary of the corresponding rationale for changes in related policies.
6. Draft of concisely worded statement.

*All policies shall be reviewed annually and revised periodically in order to meet the mission, goals, and objectives of the library. (Planning for Library Excellence, 1988)*

Just remember, policies benefit the library by:

- Supporting the library's mission, goals, and objectives,
- Guiding the library director and staff in implementation of board judgments,
- Providing direction and consistency in day-to-day service to community and library operation,
- Reducing uninformed decision-making and crisis responses to problem situations,
- Protecting the rights and assuring fair treatment of all patrons and staff members.

**Once adopted, the policies should have the unqualified support of the entire board.**

**Does your library have a comprehensive policy manual?**

**Does the board periodically reevaluate policies?**

**Is a copy of the latest policy manual on file at  
the Library of Virginia?**

**Are you familiar with all the policies adopted by the board?**

**Do you stand ready to defend the policies if they are challenged?**

## **Types of Library Policies**

There are basically two major categories of policies. **External Policies** govern service to the community, other libraries, agencies, etc., and **Internal Policies** govern the management of the library system.

Policies are as varied as the many different aspects of library service. Every phase of library operation should be broadly covered by a policy and implemented through library procedures. Local needs and situations will determine the content of both external and internal policies.

Sample policy manuals from other libraries are available from the Library Development and Networking Division of the Library of Virginia.

### ***External Policies***

#### **Public Services Policies**

Public services policies regulate the availability of library services and resources to the community. These might include:

- eligibility for use and registration, including nonresidents, institutions, and governments
- circulation: loans and renewals
- reservations, overdue, lost, and damaged materials
- fines and fees
- audiovisual services
- interlibrary loan and reciprocal borrowing
- photocopying and copyright
- reference service: scope, depth, and type
- fees for machine-assisted reference service
- confidentiality of records
- complaints and chain of authority
- programs and special events
- special collections
- exhibits and displays
- outreach services: homebound, institutionalized, handicapped, bookmobile
- rules of conduct for library users
- use of the library's meeting rooms
- hours of service
- Internet access

## **Public Relations**

The public relations policy defines the purpose and procedures for a public information and public relations program. The policy must be tailored to the local library, but it might include:

- public relations authority and responsibility
- appropriate media
- scope and emphasis
- distribution of printed materials
- participation of staff and trustees

## **Volunteers**

Policies regarding the services and support of individuals and groups for the library program might include:

- role and responsibilities
- recruitment and selection
- duties and any limitations
- Friends groups
- recognition and awards

## **Cooperation with Libraries and Groups**

Policies on cooperation define the sharing of resources and the establishment of networks with other libraries, group, and agencies. Such policies might include:

- need for cooperation
- types of cooperation
- affiliation and reciprocal arrangements
- kinds of libraries, types of groups, and agencies

## **Relations with Schools**

Policies regarding relations with schools specify areas of cooperation and any limitations of services. The policies might include:

- definition of separate functions and objectives
- statements in materials selection, borrowing privileges, and public service policies
- ways of establishing cooperation on local and regional level

## *Internal Policies*

### **General Management Policies**

General management policies provide direction for administrative decisions. These policies generally include:

- organizational authority and responsibility
- budgeting and purchasing
- use of library vehicles and equipment
- inventory and insurance of buildings and contents
- security and emergencies

### **Physical Facilities Policies**

The establishment, use, and maintenance of buildings are delineated in the physical facilities policies. Such policies might include:

- maintenance
- inventory and use of equipment
- site selection criteria for branches and bookmobile stops
- acquisition, ownership
- bulletin boards and distribution of free materials
- handicapped access features/ADA compliance
- disaster/recovery plans

### **Trustee Policies**

The constitution and bylaws of the board of trustees constitute board policy. Specific statements concerning travel expenses and membership in and attendance at professional library organizations should also be added to this section of the policy manual.

### **Materials Policies**

Materials policies should be established to assure that the collection is comprehensive, balanced, and accessible to the public. The policies might include:

- mission and goals
- description of community to be served that includes other community recreational, educational, and informational resources
- responsibility for selection
- criteria for selection and quality of materials
- type and various formats collected: paperbacks, magazines, large-print, microforms, newspapers

- audiovisual collection: films, videocassettes, videodiscs, audiocassettes, audiobooks, compact discs
- scope and emphasis of the collection
- duplication of materials
- collection development and access statements for children, young adults, and adults
- special collections
- maintenance and evaluation of collection: weeding, damaged materials, disposal, and replacement
- textbooks and materials related to school curricula
- cooperative arrangements, community resources, other arrangements
- confidentiality of library records
- censorship and controversial materials
- labeling of materials
- citizen complaints and requests for reconsideration
- Library Bill of Rights
- Freedom to Read Statement
- Freedom to View Statement
- Free Access to Libraries for Minors

### **Gifts and Special Materials**

An established policy on gifts allows the library the option to accept or refuse gifts depending on their value, use, and practicality. The policies might include:

- condition of acceptance of gift materials
- disposition of non-usable gifts
- acceptance of property, paintings, equipment, money, etc.
- denominational literature
- historical materials and writings of local authors
- memorial gifts
- recognition of gifts by the library

### **Personnel Policies**

All personnel policies must comply with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, as amended in 1972 and 1991, which prohibits discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in any term, condition, or privilege of employment. When a library comes under the direct jurisdiction of a local government, personnel policies are often those of the local government. Minor changes are adopted to reflect the schedule of the library, observance of holidays, and other special considerations. The main points of personnel policy include:

- classification and job descriptions
- organizational chart of responsibility
- salary scales

- hiring and promotions
- performance evaluation
- probationary work period
- benefits available, such as insurance, retirement, workman's compensation, etc.
- working conditions and hours of work
- vacation, holidays, sick leave, and overtime
- leaves of absence, with or without pay
- training and continuing education
- attendance at professional meetings
- grievance procedures
- disciplinary actions
- resignation and termination



## SUMMARY OF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR POLICY MAKING

### **Governing Board of Trustees<sup>1</sup>**

Determine written policies to govern operation, use, and overall program of library service.

Officially approves and adopts the written policies to govern library operation and use; assists in the interpretation of those policies to the public.

### **Library Director**

Recommends policies; advises the board on the implication of decisions.

Administers policies; maintains the library policy handbook; interprets policies to the staff and public.

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<sup>1</sup> These roles and responsibilities are for governing boards. Advisory boards' roles and responsibilities may be different.